

“History in Mind: ‘musées imaginaires’ in Literature and Films d’Art”.

Ana Lía Gabrieloni

Text, Image and Society Laboratory [LabTIS] - Sede Andina UNRN

National Scientific and Technical Research Council [CONICET]

Argentina

Abstract

This study aims at exploring unsystematic yet radically innovative changes introduced by literary texts and *films d’art* in traditional art-history discourse. We propose that things and beings assembled in literary and filmographic creations by Virginia Woolf et Roger Caillois among others, where essayism (Thomas Harrison 1992) is at work, constitute imaginary museums contributing to non-canonical art history. Since its reminiscences of ancient cabinets of curiosities, we define this history on and in images as “natural art history.” Things left out from real museums inscribe themselves therein to overcome the consuming effect of time and to become a conjectural kind of cultural documents.

Key words: natural art history - ekphrasis - *musée imaginaire*

Résumé

Cette étude vise à explorer des transformations radicalement nouvelles dans le discours traditionnel de l’histoire de l’art liées aux certains textes littéraires et films d’art. Son propos est pour l’essentiel démontrer que chez Virginia Woolf et Roger Caillois, parmi d’autres écrivains et artistes contemporains, l’essayisme (Thomas Harrison 1992) transfigure des choses et des êtres pour les représenter dans des musées imaginaires à distance de l’histoire de l’art canonique. Les rapports des musées imaginaires écrits, peints, photographiés, filmés avec des anciens cabinets de curiosités incite à penser une histoire alternative sur et avec des images. On s’intéresse alors à des représentations de choses et objets exclues des musées réels qui se voient préservés dans le cadre de ce que nous proposons d’appeler “une histoire naturelle de l’art” où ils deviens des documents conjecturaux sur la culture.

Mots clés: *histoire naturelle de l’art — ekphrasis — musée imaginaire*

*“ich ziehe durch die Vergangenheit,
wie ein Ährenleser über die Stoppeläcker;
wenn der Herr des Lands geerntet hat;
da liest man jeden Strohalm auf.”
(Hölderlin 13)¹*

The Unnaturalness of Nature

Unrestricted, boundless collections in the form of photographs, films, poetic descriptions or just abstract memories: imaginary museums have a reputation for not being modest. Their creators are endowed with such originality that they can overcome the dilemma to which real museums, according to Paul Valéry, always confront us: “*seuls contre tant d’art*”, we grow superficial, or else we grow erudite (1960a 1292).² In fact, according to Valéry in his essay “Le Problème des musées” (1923), erudition in art is a kind of dead end: “*elle éclaire ce qui n’est point le plus délicat, elle approfondit ce qui n’est point essentiel. Elle substitue ses hypothèses à la sensation, sa mémoire prodigieuse à la présence de la merveille; et elle annexe au musée*

¹ “I move through the past like a gleaner over the stubblefield when the landowner has harvested; he gathers up every straw.” (Hölderlin, *Hyperion oder 9*)

² “alone and faced with so much art” (1960c 205).

immense une bibliothèque illimitée.” (1960a 1292-1293).³ What interests us here is a series of imaginary museums written, photographed and filmed over the last one hundred years which elude documentary erudition of archives and libraries to rely on poetic and reflexive representations of things or “solid objects”. This is the title of a well-known short story by Virginia Woolf (1920) where the main character named John becomes prey to a feverish “determination to possess objects” (2000 66) that makes him collect stones and fragmented things found at random on the seaside and in the streets. His first discovery by the sea becomes visible as a green tint under a sand coating: “a full drop of solid matter— [...] a lump of glass, so thick as to be almost opaque; the smoothing of the sea had completely worn off any edge of shape, so that it was impossible to say whether it had been bottle, tumbler or window-pane; it was nothing but glass; it was almost a precious stone.” (62). Later he comes upon “a piece of china of the most remarkable shape, as nearly resembling a star fish as anything —shaped, or broken accidentally, into five irregular but unmistakable points. The colour was mainly blue, but green stripes or spots of some kind overlaid the blue, and lines for crimson gave it a richness and lustre of the most attractive kind.” (64-65).

John's walks project over time on Austerlitz's walks in the Tower Hamlets cemetery in the homonym novel by G. W. Sebald. There, Austerlitz “had taken home pebbles and ivy leaves and on one occasion a stone rose, and the stone hand broke off of one of the angels.” (2011 358). Like John, he experiences a certain form of mental disorder.⁴ Nevertheless, how the obsession and the melancholy in them grow along with their collections is of no importance here. Instead, we are interested in the increasing “ornamental nature” (Woolf 2000 65) of the objects gathered during solitary wanderings. Briefly, it is crucial how those object descriptions are indistinguishable from the way John perceives and portrays their ambiguous nature in Woolf's short story, where their instrumentalist teleology is dislocated into an aesthetic scene (Brown 3).

The essayistic component in the short story, just as relevant as the contingent aesthetic factor in the objects represented there, is revealed in Woolf's phenomenological analysis of the perception of the ephemera of daily life: “Looked at again and again half consciously by a mind thinking of something else, any object mixes itself so profoundly with the stuff of thought that it loses its actual form and recomposes itself a little differently in an ideal space which haunts the brain when we least expect it” (Woolf 2000 63). This interpretation has a counterpart in Roger Caillois' notion of imagination as one of the conceivable possibilities of matter (1975 42-43). A formula that inspired a series of books written by him during the second half of the last century about the “laconic otherness” (43) of the mineral world. The books are entitled: *Pierres* (1966), *L'Écriture de pierres* (1970), *Pierres réfléchies* (1975).

Not surprisingly, Woolf and Caillois conceive of description as a mimetic force transcending the visible appearance of everyday things to penetrate into their hidden aspects as they are revealed to individual perception. Therein lies the sensitive component of “Solid Objects” and the texts on stones by Caillois. This component, since it implies “the profound otherness that the ordinary can take on when it is looked at rather than merely seen” (Sim 53), provides an ideal frame for written and mechanical reproduced images to be transfigured into imaginary museums. In turn, these unique museums originate an alternative art history which I would like to call *natural art history* given the resemblance that imaginary museums maintain with ancient

³ “throwing light on what is least refined, investigating the non-essentials. For direct feeling, it substitutes theories; for the marvellous actuality, an encyclopaedic memory; and the immense museum is further saddled with a limitless library.” (1960c 205)

⁴ In respect to existing relations between collecting and psychological disorders see: A. E. NORDSLETTEN et al., “Finders keepers: The features differentiating hoarding disorder from normative collecting.” *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, 2013 54: 229–237.

cabinets of curiosities (and the *Kunstkammer*) rather than with modern art galleries.⁵ Furthermore, the notion I propose entails life in all its expressions as natural history considers it, in contrast to the “botany of death” opening the film essay by Marker and Resnais, *Les Statues meurent aussi* (1953), where culture ossified in traditional art museums becomes a significant issue (Huyseer 13). An issue ultimately related to Theodor W. Adorno’s critique of culture fetishisation as it is exposed in an early essay initially published as “*Die Idee der Naturegeschichte*” in 1932 and translated into English as “The Idea of Natural History”. While it intends “to comprehend an object as natural where it appears most historical and as historical where it appears most natural.” (Hullot-Kentor 239), Adorno’s “idea of natural-history” particularly interests us as far as it provides a theoretical and critical background for a key notion of the present essay. To put it in Tom Whyman’s terms, we should not forget that the Frankfurt School philosopher undertakes with it an interpretation of reality in line with the assumption that “what is natural has always itself formed historically” and so it has always been subject to the effects of historical change (16).

Considering the above, natural art history as conceived here would arguably comprise imaginary museums which themselves comprise verbal and visual representations of “the invisible original sequence of prime objects” that —according to George Kubler (40)— survive as “occasional jeweled links connected by the broken but much-repaired chain made of string and wire” of canonic art history.⁶ However, ensuring the survival of those primal links along with dominant art history narrative makes one feel like the gleaner in the cited words of Friedrich Hölderlin (2014 13): “über die Stoppeläcker, wenn der Herr des Lands geerntet hat; da liest man jeden Strohalm auf.”⁷ But —in the context of a natural art history— straw becomes the “luminous debris” revealed after the archaeological excavations evoked in the dazzling essays by Gustav Sobin (2000). In fact, essayism is the touchstone of textual and film imaginary museums contributing to the unfolding of a natural art history. In this regard, it cannot be ignored what Adorno himself wrote in his seminal and renowned “Essay as Form”: “this is precisely what the essay reflects on: the relationship of nature and culture [...] Instead of ‘reducing’ cultural phenomena, the essay immerses itself in them as though in a second nature, a second immediacy“ (20). The correspondences between essay and “natural history” thus seem to shape a programmatic proposal which ends in a theory of aesthetic modernity (Pensky 249) where, it can be claimed, essayistic serial imagery of everyday’s objects and things in literature, photography and cinema demands contemplating a natural history of art.

Accretion or otherwise destruction

Writing on Montaigne’s essays, Woolf underlines that “the best prose is that which is most full of poetry” (1984 73). Poetic prose in its canonic version —the prose poem— leads the critic Michel Riffaterre (117) to assume that it is an oxymoron. Woolf (59) reaches existentialist and less conclusive ideas about it: an

⁵ In fact, private collections such as cabinets of curiosities contributed at large to public museum formation from the XVII century onwards. This process has led to a well defined museum typology which differentiates art works from natural things. See: Julius VON SCHLOSSER. *Die Kunst- und Wunderkammern der Spätrenaissance*. Leipzig: Verlag von Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1908; IMPEY, MacGregor, Arthur OLIVER (ed.). *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985; POMIAN, Krysztof, *Collectors and Curiosities. Paris and Venice 1500-1800*, Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990; RIVALLAIN, Josette. “Cabinets de curiosité, aux origines des musées”. *Outre-mers* 88. 332-33 (2001): 17-35.

⁶ “Let us suppose that the idea of art can be expanded to embrace the whole range of man-made things, including all tools of writing in addition to the useless, beautiful, and poetic things of the world. By this view the universe of man-made things simply coincides with the history of art.” (Kubler 1).

⁷ “over the stubblefield when the landowner has harvested: he gathers up every straw.” (1990 9)

essay is the expression of one's inner life in disagreement with outer life.⁸ For the philosopher and critic Thomas Harrison, a solution to the conflict between “thinking, feeling and acting” essential to “our own theoretical climate” (29) —where one's experience of the present is “proleptic and inconclusive”— must be sought in “an immanent critique of the understanding itself, in a rehearsal of the self-critical nature of knowledge” (220-225). Akin to ideas of Robert Musil, Harrison's theory proposes essayism as “a paradigm for both thinking and acting, [...] a response to an ontology in which experience appears already to transpire in the manner of an essay [...] this ontology of the essay,” he claims, “supplies the ground for an ethical and cognitive methodology.” (9)⁹

It is our concern here to observe how ontological, ethical and cognitive aspects of essayism in literature and film could shape prevailing narratives on the history of images with an impact on culture history.¹⁰ In this connection, Caillois' emphasis on the abstract quality of stones and butterflies' wings puts in proper perspective the alleged originality of abstraction in avant-garde painting. So thus two chapters, “Les ailes des papillons“ and “Natura pictrix”, of his book *Méduse et cie.* (1960) are devoted to further reflections on the transpositions and even forgeries which, according to the French author, result from a kind of complicity between nature and artists (44, 58).

The fact that abstract painting started to be documented in art history only at the beginning of the last century suggests that nature has been ahead of art in the emergence of the non-figurative. Therefore, Caillois does not hesitate to turn upside down the system of correspondences between mineral world and art in his books on stones. Our itineraries through Caillois' pages full of poetic visual descriptions make us feel, just like John or Austerlitz, astonished at the allurements of a thing or object unexpectedly found. Let us consider a few of examples extracted from *L'Écriture des pierres*, a book with a preface by Marguerite Yourcenar, who emphasises the author's indifference toward what is human in favour of the unpredictable forces at work in the “eventful history of stones” (xiii-xiv):

Entre les flammes d'un astre incandescent, resurgissent dans la nuit de la pierre des épis lumineux, barbelés, des semences flottantes échappées du chardon central, fixées à l'instant de leur envol et qui font comme une gloire au capitule originel. (1970 62)¹¹

Les lignes souples et vivantes impriment dans le silex incoercible l'idée, la formule d'un mouvement plus complexe et plus libre que celui des ondes qui, à la surface d'un fluide, s'éloignent du point où celui-ci fut ému. Ici, ce sont des craquelures aux angles vifs qui se progagent dans un milieu coagulé et qu'amortit vite la fermeté du minéral. (1970 63)¹²

Dans la pierre, [...] l'image, chaque image est fixée comme si l'épaisseur du minéral conservait la nuée, la flamme ou la cascade à tous les instants de sa métamorphose kaléidoscopique. Chacun d'eux,

⁸ According to Juliet DUSINBERRE (219), Woolf's communion with Montaigne responds to “an urgent need to communicate the sense of a self at odds with its own time and culture”.

⁹ For an insightful and more recent view on the implications conveyed by *essayism* in Robert Musil's thought see: Jean-Pierre COMETTI. *Musil Philosophe. L'utopie de l'essayisme.* Paris: du Seuil, 2001.

¹⁰ On the film essay see our work: “El ensayo documental: la poética del disentimiento”. Analía Gerbaudo (ed.). *IX Congreso Argentino de Literatura*, 2014. URL: [http:// www.fhuc.unl.edu.ar/centros/cedintel/argentino.pdf](http://www.fhuc.unl.edu.ar/centros/cedintel/argentino.pdf) (06.02.18)

¹¹ Out of the dark of the stone, between the beams of an incandescent star, shine bright streaks and points like dandelion seeds blown from the stem, fixed in their flight and forming a kind of halo around their original center. (1985 49)

¹² The bold, flowing lines print on the unyielding silex the idea of, the recipe for, a freer and more complex motion than that of waves spreading outward from a disturbance in the surface of a liquid. What we have here is sharp-angled craquelure making its way through a solid medium and soon brought to a halt by the strength of the stone. (49-50)

témoin immortel, est enregistré pour longtemps: pour toujours, à l'échelle de la brève saison humaine (1970 117).¹³

Occasionally, mineral thickness or the “stillness of death” (Caillois 1970 3) is interrupted in archaeological sites. Sobin believes that archaeology often functions oppositely from memory: “the further down we explore, the more intact (or, at least, the more intrinsic) the vestige becomes. At a given depth, the trace —fortuitous at the surface— grows as more and more manifest, conclusive” (105). This makes us think of the film *Viaggio in Italia* (1953-1954) by Roberto Rossellini. In it, memory, art, and archaeology combine with the singular poetry of the natural and cultural landscapes in Naples and its surroundings, where past and present merge into the archaeological discovery of a couple who has been buried in ashes during the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in ancient Pompeii.¹⁴ It is therefore possible to conclude in Laura Mulvey’s terms (114) that “Vesuvius dominates the landscape physically and [...] the culture that the film explores” as well as the mythical Fitz Roy dominates natural landscape in the film essay *Images of Nowhere* (2016), made in the Argentine Patagonia by the independent filmmaker Rubén Guzmán. It will complete the selection of written and filmed works to be discussed below.

Now, even though the film by Rossellini might offer us inspiring insights into the relations between poetry and art, essay and imaginary museums, the need to complete a textual series based on these same relations draws our attention directly to the works by two other authors. One of them is Turkish, and the other is English. The former, Orhan Pamuk, wrote a book entitled *The Innocence of Objects [Masumiyet Müzesi]* (2008) which was then materialised in a museum created by the writer himself (2015). It displays objects associated with Istanbul’s everyday life in particular regard to the characters in the novel: Füsün and Kemal, through framed glass-vitrines reproduced in photographs in the book. Variations of the textual and visual dialogue established among the novel, the museum and the objects therein contained can be appreciated at large in the film essay *The Innocence of Memories* directed by Grant Gee (2015), who had made before the magnificent film essay *Patience (After Sebald)* (2012). Pamuk sets out the way to an assemblage of objects whose nature dislocates from material culture into refined poetic images in a literary language (Xing 199) translated then into cinema by Gee.

Cityscape is an object of worship in Pamuk as “porcelain landscapes” in Edmund de Waal (2015 825), who has been making pottery since he was a child. Porcelain pots are actually in the origin of many of his art installations in England and abroad. Not surprisingly he has published two books, *The Hare with Amber Eyes* (2010) and *The White Road. Journey into an Obsession* (2015), where words and images coexist and form an autobiographic map that could also be interpreted as a sort of historical biogeography mainly dependent on two factors. First, a hereditary one —in the material and symbolic senses of inherited property and knowledge/technique respectively— and, second, an environmental factor —as far as “grail moments” in de Waal’s journey reside in “whole landscapes of porcelain” (2015 825). Accordingly, the first book is subordinated to the story of an ancestral collection of 264 ivory and wood miniatures [netsuke] from Japan

¹³ “in a stone the image —every image— is fixed, as if the thickness of the mineral preserved the cloud, the flame, or the waterfall at every moment of its kaleidoscopic metamorphosis. Each image is an immortal witness, recorded for a long period of time: forever, measured against the brief human season” (100)

¹⁴ Jacques Rivette, in his “Lettre sur Rossellini” (*Cahiers du Cinéma*, 46, April 1955), contributes with his reflections on the Italian film to increase the reach and impact of Woolf y Harrison’s ideas on essay(ism) across the arts: “For over fifty years now the essay has been the very language of modern art; it is freedom, concern, exploration, spontaneity; it has gradually —Gide, Proust, Valéry, Chardonne, Audiberti— buried the novel beneath it, since Manet and Degas it has reigned over painting, and gives it its impassioned manner, the sense of pursuit and proximity.” (199)

while the other one takes the form of a diary where the author registers his pilgrimage through “three places where porcelain was invented, or reinvented, three white hills in China and Germany and England.” (3)¹⁵

Pamuk and de Waal's literary-visual works challenge the entity of modern art museums bringing into question the criteria underlying their collections as well as the function of the space involved in exhibitions and storage.¹⁶ They are viewed as none but symptomatic expressions of the already mentioned culture ossification whose pragmatical mute immediacy contrasts with the “rather painful business” of “remembering Time—the line connecting all the moments that Aristotle called the present” (Pamuk 197). The Turkish writer—in “A Modest Manifesto for Museums”—predicts the future of museums “inside our own homes” as he also explains that “The Museum of Innocence has been made by those who think that this is possible, by those who believe in the magic of objects. [...] unlike the passionate collector, we are not moved by the fetishist's desire to possess things, but rather by the wish to know the objects' secrets.” (195)

On its part, de Waal's literary essay clears the way to a natural art history well founded on objects scattered across an admittedly ignored place: “one of hundreds in these hills [in Jingdezhen], not a major kiln site, unimportant for art history, not documented, known to the farmers who would have to deal with the waste, the shards they have to shovel away to clear the field for beans” (2015 25). After a long reflection on vitrines for private art collections, the artist—who is fond of arranging his porcelain pots behind glazed glass in installations in an effort “to get objects out of the glass cases in which [his] pots were often placed in galleries and museums”—concludes: “I use this blurring because it is a more accurate means to keep objects in flux than having them under museum condition light, pinned in an airless box” (Byatt et al. 210). He also considers that a vitrine, as opposed to a museum box-case where objects seem to be lifeless, dry butterflies inside insect boxes: “—is for opening” (2011 66).

The collection “of things found, things given, things dug up” (2015 252) de Waal used to order and reorder when he was a child is a favourite memory that he recalls in his two books: “It was my Wunderkammer, my world of things, my secret history of touch” (350). There, there were “bones, a mouse skin, shells, a tiger's claw, the sloughed scales of a snake, clay pipes and oyster shells” together with “Ammonites and trilobites, ferns and the hipbone of an iguanodon” from an old collection of minerals and fossils he once received as a gift (252). Those “places of accretion” (158), rooms and cabinets with collections, are part of de Waal's personal story; he remembers in the “prehistory” (2011 33) of his netsuke collection his wealthy ancestor Charles Ephrussi who went from collecting predictable things during his *Grand Tour* in Italy to buying lacquer and the latest Oriental object or album of erotic prints speaking “of collecting themselves” (2015 34, 43).

¹⁵ Jingdezhen in China, Dresden in Germany, and Cornwall in the South Est of England.

¹⁶ Pamuk writes: “Toward the end of the 1990s, [...] I began to buy objects with both the novel and the museum in mind” (37). The collected “universe of objects” that would fill the museum and the novel merges with the author's impulses to reemerge the painter in himself in such a way that one could admit an ongoing project consisting in an overall work of art, powerful enough to reverse what he calls “the massacre of objects”: “as the city grew wealthier and more modern between 1950 and 1980, the things left behind from its Ottoman past and its non-Muslim inhabitants—printed matter, almost unlimited quantities of photographic equipment, and vast amounts of papers, furniture, books, old money, and other assorted knickknacks that filled the used bookshops, antique shops, and flea markets across the city—were incinerated, pulped, or otherwise destroyed.” (43)

As we become increasingly acquainted with the ideas and interests at the core of Pamuk and Waal's artistic and literary works, we realise that they stand out for their "musées imaginaires" intended to *re-form* or *reform* our understanding of the entire art history (Didi-Huberman 68).¹⁷ To widen this notion reminiscent of André Malraux, I will recur again to Paul Valéry, this time on the portrait of Olympia by Édouard Manet (fig. 1): "*Sa tête est vide: un fil de velours noir l'isole de l'essentiel de son être. La pureté d'un trait parfait enferme l'impure par excellence*" (1960b 1329).¹⁸ The essayistic lyrical poetry of descriptions found throughout the literary, photographic and film works interpreted here are essential to the impure par excellence, that is to say: life itself portrayed as it happens every day. In fact, according to Malraux, the original condition in imaginary museums is to allow unrestricted access to such a diversity of images "*qui va pousser à l'extrême l'incomplète confrontation imposée par les vrais musées.*" (Malraux 1951 14)¹⁹

It is necessary to stress that the key to the transfiguration of a textual or filmographic work into an imaginary museum is essayism, which clears a void full of self-resonances in texts and films. Essayism instils in them the lost transparency in everyday life. At some point, the conversion of simple everyday things carried out by essayism on the double level of aesthetics and criticism in literary and film works finds its synthesis in a metaphor in *Austerlitz* by Sebald. It associates the sea to a powerful magnifying lens through which images of the world can be seen restored: "the loveliest colours [which] have already disappeared, or existed only where no one saw them, in the submarine gardens fathoms deep below the surface of the sea." (62)

That sort of "*mare cognitum*" is unveiled in *Images of Nowhere*, the film essay above-mentioned, made by Rubén Guzmán (2016). As in a painted oriental landscape water flows throughout the film from and into its origin and reservoir: the legendary Fitz Roy. The mountain was the object of contemplation of a German photographer called Ernst Stanhardt (1888-1965) who used to wander over the Patagonia landscapes on his photo lab-trailer at the beginning of the last century. During the film, he reads a letter addressed to his beloved friend, Aída, who took care of him before his death. The letter together with the images transport us into an impressive natural history museum where landscape, Chinese scholar's rocks, miniatures, quotations from Rainer Maria Rilke, George Simmel, Gaston Bachelard, George Steiner, Aleksandr Sokurov, among others poets, thinkers and artists, archive material and real images lay out the basis for a continuous reflection on images, time, space and life since: "From a philosophical point of view" —as the letter supposedly written by Stanhardt explicits— "one could say that landscape is a moral issue. As a witness of death, landscape is an absolute category".

All the above significantly contributes to our hypothesis on essayism and its effects on the levels of textual and audiovisual representation of imaginary museums, which for its part contribute to what can be conceived as non-canonical art history. The film by Guzmán frames a sort of natural history museum which is as imaginary as the cascade painted by Li Cin Chi on the bedroom screens of the Emperor Suang Sung. And yet the film reminds us that the Emperor wishes the cascade was removed because of its noise that disturbs his

¹⁷ See our works on "musée imaginaire" in art history and criticism: "Historia y crítica del arte. Intento de desnaturalizar sus conversiones recientes". *Armiliar*. 2 (mayo 2018), 1-10. URL: <https://doi.org/10.24215/25457888e001>; and "Museos reales, ideales e imaginarios de la éfrasis". A. L. GABRIELONI (ed.). *Interrelaciones entre literatura y arte. América y Europa en las épocas Moderna y Contemporánea*. Viedma: UNRN, 2018.

¹⁸ "Her empty head is separated from her essential being by a thin band of black velvet. Impurity personified is isolated by that pure and perfect stroke." (1960d 109)

¹⁹ "that will push to extremes the incomplete confrontation imposed by real museums." (Malraux 1967 14). Not surprisingly that is a notion underlying Pamuk's novel *The Innocence of Objects*, where he writes about the museum concerning his narrative: "The Museum of Innocence is based on the assumption that objects used for different purposes and that evoke disparate memories can, when placed side by side, bring forth unusual emotions and thoughts. This thought was inspired by our fathers' cabinets." (183)

sleep (fig. 2). The explanation for this enigma lies in Aída's letter: "Photography is, too, a miniature and therefore an abyss of space since a change of scale implies a change of time. [so] A change of scale, therefore, is a change of reality". Changes such as these unfolding before our eyes transport us toward a universe of representations dependent on cognitive and aesthetic appropriation practices associated with collecting; what is more, those changes perfectly dissect the anatomy of collections assembled in cabinets which used to be regarded as *imago mundi* (daCosta Kaufmann 24; von Schlosser 143; Bredekamp 36; Clifford 70; Rivallain 18; Guichard 152), that is to say as a miniature of the world and, so, a "memory theatre" (DaCosta Kaufman 25; Bredekamp 41; Desvallées & Mairesse 139).

If nature, as Caillois reminds us, is a reservoir of aesthetic forms *avant l'art* then it should be considered beyond the settlement of boundaries between natural history museums and art museums from the eighteenth century onward. As a matter of fact, a line has been drawn, but the border is far from settled. Ekphrastic representations of things and objects become the source for imaginary museums in literature and cinema where preponderant visual heterogeneity is more evocative of seventeenth-century cabinets of curiosities rather than of modern art museums.²⁰ It is our task to work on a comprehensive history of things left out of real museums because, as Aloïs Riegl (1928) put it, "even a secondary literary monument like a scrap of paper with a brief and insignificant note contains a whole series of artistic elements —the form of the piece of paper, the letters, and their composition [...] were this scrap of paper the only surviving testimony to the art of its time, we would consider it, though trivial in itself, an utterly indispensable artifact." (72) We should, then, consider an alternative art history which might benefit from imaginary museums whose collections do not work as a metaphor for capitalism (Boltanski and Esquerre 247). Collections, comprising series of literary and (audio)visual imagery, where aesthetic incompleteness leads things and objects to exist hypothetically and, so, "to essay the opportunities of the historical present" (Harrison 165). Inevitably, that present involves ephemera of everyday found everywhere. Once again it is necessary to emphasise how essential is the cabinet of curiosities as methodological and teleological notion for identifying and interpreting textual/(audio)visual images of those things and objects organised into series according to the endogenous, autocratic, and autotelic criteria that collections regularly meet (Vouilloux 4). The remarkable effectiveness of such serial imagery relies on given modes of cognitive and aesthetic procedures aiming at the preservation and documentation of the environment and culture in such a way as in classical cabinets of curiosities (Desvallées and Mairesse 139; Guichard 14). Indeed, the need to save our planet's environment is not only an urgency to associate with but also to promote the need to preserve culture and art in all its manifestations (Débray 1992), in so far as environment and nature regularly constitute arts' subject matter.

²⁰ For a conceptual history of ekphrasis —where J. A. W. Heffernan, W. J. T. Mitchell and B. Vouilloux have made major contributions— and its impact on art and literature history and criticism see our works: "Écfrasis" *Eadem utraque Europa*. 6 (2008): 83-108; and also: "Interpretaciones teóricas y poéticas de las relaciones entre literatura y pintura. Breve esbozo histórico del Renacimiento a la Modernidad". *Saltana. Revista de literatura y traducción*. 1. (2001-2004). URL: <http://www.saltana.org/1/docar/0010.html> (03.22.18)

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§ *Illustrations captions*

Fig. 1. Edouard Manet (1832-1883), *Olympia*, 1863. Oil on canvas. 130 x 190 cm. Paris: Musée d'Orsay (detail).

Fig. 2. *Images of Nowhere*. Directed by Rubén Guzmán (Bariloche & Buenos Aires: Raymond Beluga Studio, 2016), DVD (Private Collection).